

OLD-TIME RADIO

Before TV took over the American consciousness, imaginations were stimulated and creativity was inspired, as a whole generation listened to radio. Along with the great stars of stage and film who brightened the airways, an entirely new batch of personalities developed directly as a result of their performances and appearances on radio.

Alas, this world of imagination, limited only by the listener's mind, was limited itself to a relatively few short years. But Jay Hickerson and others like him still hear those long ago voices and keep them sparkling alive through the collection of old-time radio (OTR) shows.

Hickerson, born in 1934, has been collecting since 1970. As a professional pianist and entertainer he collected theme songs of radio and TV shows to use in his act. He would play them and ask his audience to identify them. Through a friend, he acquired four reels of tape with about 100 original radio broadcasts on them. He liked what he heard and, armed with these shows, a primitive catalog and two tape recorders, he "invaded the world of experienced collectors."

He now has approximately 9000 programs, spanning the entire Golden Age of Radio from the 30's to the 50's. He claims to have one of the largest collections of Jack Benny broadcasts (some 570 shows as of December, 1988), including Benny's very first show in 1932.

Hickerson also specializes in Suspense and Gunsmoke. He has nearly every episode of Suspense (lacking only a few titles), which was a program devoted to chilling plays and horror stories, broadcast from 1942 - 1962. His collection of Gunsmoke on radio from 1952 - 1961, starring William Conrad, is complete except for a few titles. Over 150 bandleaders are represented in his collection of big band broadcast tapes.

A most intriguing characteristic of radio show buffs is that they all trade their shows with each other, usually without any financial remuneration. Hickerson says it is all done on the honor system. Each old-time radio buff has a catalog of the items that he owns and wants to own and collectors trade around in this fashion, sending the shows wanted and waiting for the shows they want, usually on a one-to-one basis.

Old-time radio is not as popular as some of the other nostalgic areas such as comic books, science fiction and fantasy. One reason is that old-time radio is not visual; a second reason is that most of the other nostalgic areas continue today while OTR is a thing of the past; another is that there is limited monetary value to the broadcasts. All OTR shows can be duplicated so it is difficult to have a "unique" broadcast unless a person has the original transcription disc or master tape which he is unwilling to share. There are about 4000 people in the country who actively collect and trade.

There are always new transcriptions of shows being discovered so there is plenty of material to collect and trade. Some collectors have over 100,000 shows.

Hickerson has not been content with just collecting the OTR shows. He has been publishing a bimonthly newsletter, **Hello Again**, since 1970. "Hello Again" was the popular catchword of Jack Benny. The newsletter consists of 4 to 6 pages consisting of news about radio show collectors and personalities of that bygone era, along with information about collectors' wants and needs. It has become the oldest and one of the most respected and widely read in the hobby, with about 400 subscribers in the United States and abroad.

Since 1971, Hickerson has helped run annual old-time radio conventions near his Hamden, Connecticut home. Since 1976 the conventions have been run by the Friends of Old-time Radio, an informal organization of OTR enthusiasts. These three-day affairs, with Hickerson as chairman, feature workshops on various aspects of OTR, and provide opportunities for buffs to

meet each other, trade shows and meet some of the stars of old-time radio. Over 30 personalities usually come each year. Two or three re-creations of OTR shows are presented each year, giving the personalities a chance to perform once again. This is the oldest convention of its kind in the country and is very popular.

Hickerson has gotten a great deal of pleasure from his hobby. He tends to be nostalgic so he enjoys listening to and collecting the programs. Hickerson also enjoys the correspondence with people around the country and meeting them at the conventions.

For Hickerson, a fascination with OTR shows is easily explainable. It is something you hear, not see. He has a vivid imagination and the shows appeal to it. Also they are a reflection of society at the time of the shows.

The shows are important historic documents, too. There are many visual records of Jack Benny, but we need to hear what he sounded like, also.

All in all just using your imagination is the most important. Many people today don't know how to do that.

The beginning radio show collector need only have a reel-to-reel or cassette tape recorder and contact with other collectors to begin the hobby. Hickerson can supply information on all OTR clubs and publications, all logs available by various collectors, and radio stations broadcasting OTR. These are included with the first issue of **Hello Again**. A collectors' list is also available. A sample copy of Hello Again will be sent if you send a SASE. In 1992, Hickerson wrote The Ultimate History of Network Radio Programming and Guide To All circulating Shows. This 450-page reference book lists over 6000 network, local and syndicated radio programs and traces each program by giving broadcast dates, sponsors, network and air time. The book also lists all shows available to collectors. Hickerson revised the book in 1996. Hickerson also wrote many other logs (a log is a listing of the details of each show broadcast) including Jack Benny, Suspense, Gunsmoke, CBS Radio Mystery Theater and Fred Allen.

To contact him for information and/or costs of the above, you may write to:

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E-mail <JayHick@aol.com>

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH JAY HICKERSON

Most of us agree that Jay Hickerson, the spark-plug of the annual Friends of Old Time Radio Convention, is one of the most knowledgeable and active people in our hobby today. Over the past 25 years he has accumulated approximately 8000 shows, published "Hello Again" on a regular basis, authored the comprehensive, 500 page "Ultimate History of Network Radio", and organized and revised several OTR program logs. In this exclusive interview with "Radio Recall", Jay talks about his background in OTR, the origin of his various projects, and his hopes for the future.

How did HELLO AGAIN begin and how has it changed over the years?

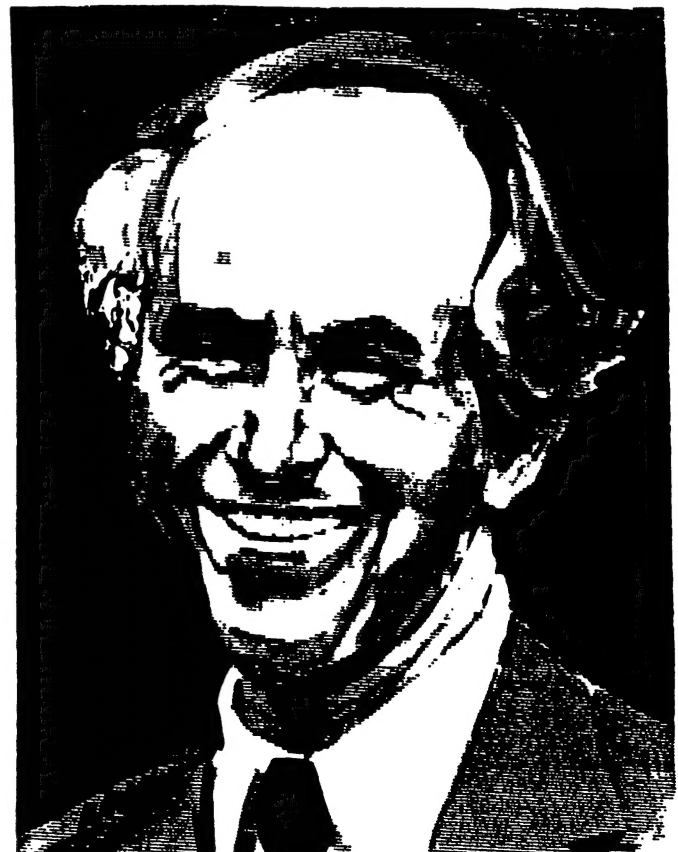
It began in early 1970 with my catalog and various supplements I added. My third supplement (April 1970) had a page of "Comments and Tidbits", identifying the people who had helped me and describing myself and my collection. My June 1970 supplement, called HELLO AGAIN, in honor of Jack Benny, included ideas on collecting, trading, and I offered subscriptions at a dollar a year. It was

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What caused you to have such an interest in Old Time Radio?

Well, I'm not as good at reminiscing as I am at organizing the FOTR Convention, but I'll try.... When I was growing up, my family had no television, only radio, so I grew up listening to all those great shows. When I left home in the mid 50s, we still didn't have television so I was listening to Gunsmoke and other shows. **When did you begin trading OTR shows and with whom?**

In January 1970 I obtained four reels with about 100 shows from Sal Trapani, who lived near my Connecticut residence. With a primitive catalog and no knowledge about the hobby, I started trading with experienced collectors, whose addresses I found in Nostalgia Magazine. Dick Ayers of New Hampshire, who doesn't trade any more, was one of the main ones I traded with in those days. I was very energetic and well-organized and promptly responded to all trades so by the end of that first year, I had accumulated over 3,000 shows.



(Artist: Dave Warren)

only two pages, and for the first few years it was mimeographed. In the early 80s, it was xeroxed and by then it was six dollars a year. By the mid-80s, I had a computer and the format improved and the length increased to four pages. It's now published bimonthly, can run up to eight pages, and a yearly subscription is \$ 15.

We've heard the first FOTR Convention was held in your back yard. How and when did it actually start?

Back in 1971 Sal Trapani suggested I help him organize a small get-together of OTR buffs. We called it the SAVE Convention, which was an acronym for The Society of VIntage-Radio Enthusiasts. Bret Morrison was at our very first convention, which was held at the Holiday Inn at New Haven. We held one a year (for five years) at various hotels around New Haven. The committee meetings for these first five conventions were held in peoples' houses, or outside if it was nice weather.

By 1976 we had changed the name to Friends of Old Radio but Sal, myself, and the committee of volunteers had differences as to the direction the convention should be taking. Sal left and we continued on, changing the name to Friends of Old Time Radio. The conventions in 1976 and 1977 were held in the Holiday Inn of Meriden and the next four years we had it in the Holiday Inn at Bridgeport.

Since 1982 it has always been held in the Holiday Inn North at Newark. It was still only a one-day event in 1982 but expanded to two days in 1983. By 1988 we were beginning the convention on Thursday evening and, of course now, we begin on Wednesday night and it runs a full three days.

It would be impossible for me to list all the wonderful people who have helped me run the convention, and I won't try to name them for fear of leaving someone out. But it simply takes a lot of volunteers to staff all the responsibilities that come with it.

You've produced a lot of OTR logs. How are they done and what advice do you have for researchers who want to do a log on a series?

Well, as I said, I'm well-organized, and I've been collecting this data for over 25 years. The computer enabled me to store, process and print the information I'd been gathering. Much of that data I got from dealers through HELLO AGAIN and from my extensive library. Many hours pouring over the microfilm copies of the New York Times and Radio Guide at the public library were involved. The single most important person in compiling the logs was certainly Ray Standish.

My advice to researchers working on a log would be to use the above methods, and in

addition, try to gain access to the original scripts. Many of them exist at various libraries and other archives.

What led you to compile the "Ultimate History" publication? Any idea how many man-hours were expended in that project?

The idea for it came from a casual remark from some lady to me in 1985 who said that she wished there were a way to find out how many shows were actually available for trade. She said she read several dealers' catalogs, but there was no one source. I went back to the computer, got all the data from every dealer I knew, and by 1986 I had finished a booklet on all the circulating shows and the names of all the OTR dealers.

In 1987 I brought out another booklet on the dates of all network series. I had begun with the publication of Harrison B. Summers which covered network radio 1926-1956. But this was only data chronologically by year and I wanted it alphabetically by program name. I contacted the people at Ohio on the Summers team and they let me use their data as a start. It took just about a year of many, many hours, to review the radio sections of the New York Times and back issues of RADIO GUIDE.

Five years later I combined the two books into my "Ultimate History and Guide" which first came out in 1992. My friends continued to supply me with additions and corrections and I produced three supplements to it in the next few years. In 1996, instead of bringing out another supplement, I re-did the entire publication and printed a new edition.

I have no idea of the total hours spent on it but it was a very large undertaking.

What's the background on your other publication, OTR NECROLOGY?

Well, for many years I'd been collecting information on OTR stars who had left us and I'd been printing this in HELLO AGAIN. Much of the information I got from obituaries in Variety and the rest I obtained from friends who sent me the data. Since there was no one source of information on the dates of deaths of OTR stars, I compiled my necrology, which now has information on over 3,000 personalities, including the date they died and how old they were at the time.

What does your family think of this obsession with OTR? Do you have any other hobbies?

First of all, I don't think it's an obsession. My job as a music teacher and piano entertainer gives me a very flexible schedule so I am free to engage in this hobby with no job conflicts. My wife, Karen, is also interested in OTR, though certainly not as much as I am. I'm grateful to her for putting up with me for spending hours viewing microfilm or plugging

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away at the computer. My son and daughter used to help me put out HELLO AGAIN. I don't think they are very interested in OTR now although Craig does collect Superman premiums and other paraphernalia. Other hobbies, well, I used to collect stamps but *Old Time Radio* pushed that to one side.

What do you see in the future for the FOTR Convention?

We're going to gradually shift from the radio entertainers to the early television ones. Unfortunately, there's no way around it. At our 1996 convention we had Will Hutchins and John Hart. And in the future, when I can no longer handle this job, I hope others will step forward to keep it going. I've always been willing to share the responsibilities of the convention. I'll continue to put out my publications, including HELLO AGAIN, as long as I can and as long as they are wanted.

Is there anything you would like to say to the new people coming into our hobby?

I'd say....go slow. Take your time and learn about this hobby from experienced collectors. Build your own collection slowly. There are many reputable dealers out there. Make it a practice to buy a few tapes from many of them and then determine who has the shows and the quality at the price you want to pay.

If you are interested in subscribing to "Hello Again" or purchasing any of Jay's various publications, you can write him at P.O. Box 4821, Hamden, CT. 06514 or e-mail him at JayHick@aol.com or phone him at (203) 248-2887.



from the **EDITOR'S DESK**

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We'd like to thank Ron Barnett for his efforts in this issue. His Part II on the QUIET PLEASE series appears in this issue, and judging from the comments on Part I, our readers have been eagerly awaiting his conclusions and complete log. Ron was also the springboard to our exclusive interview with Jay Hickerson. It was Ron's suggestion that we contact Jay for this piece and we hope all of you are delighted with the final product.

Congratulations to the Milwaukee Area Radio Enthusiasts (MARE) for being featured in a full two-page article (in color) on the front page of the Entertainment Section of the Milwaukee Journal in December. My brother, Mark, sent me a copy of it last month and I was very happy to see one of our sister clubs get such great publicity.

On the InterNet, I read that THE GUIDING LIGHT celebrated its 60th Anniversary on CBS on January 16, 1997. On that date CBS did a re-creation of the original radio show in 1937 with a cast taken from the current cast on the television version. However, listeners in the Washington, DC area could neither listen to it nor record it, since our CBS affiliates here declined to air this historic show. Anybody out there got a dub of it?

Ed Walker needs our help at the WAMU-FM fund raiser on Sunday March 9th. Volunteers are needed to answer the phones during his THE BIG BROADCAST. Please call the station at (202) 885-1200 and volunteer a few hours of your time.

If you're interested in new radio shows, based on the OTR mode, you will be interested in ZBS Foundation. They produce adventure, sci-fi and mystery radio programs on cassette in the grand tradition of the Golden Age of Radio. For a free catalog, contact them at RR 1, Box 1201, Fort Edward, NY 12828.

The next issue of RADIO RECALL will have a three page article on one of radio's most unusual "super-heroes", THE BLUE BEETLE. This article was originally written for "The Illustrated Press" by Chuck Juzek and we are fortunate to have obtained permission to re-print this very informative and entertaining article on this OTR series.

Jack Benny was honored recently by the Library of Congress fora movie! Each year they select 25 films judged to be "culturally, historically, or anesthesically significant" for inclusion in the National Film Registry. Among the 25 selected last month was Jack's 1942 classic, "To Be Or Not To Be" which co-starred Carole Lombard.

Jay A. Hickerson

Pianist and Entertainer



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Jay Hickerson has performed for audiences throughout the northeast as a pianist and bandleader. He was a member of the Johnson Junior Symphony during his high school years and has performed music all his life. A Hartt College of Music graduate, Mr. Hickerson taught piano for 45 years.

In addition to being a pianist, Mr. Hickerson incorporates entertainment trivia into his act, and encourages audience participation. He has entertained different age groups, and because he tailors his program to his audience, his appeal is intergenerational. His repertoire spans decades.

Mr. Hickerson served as president of the New Haven Chapter of the Connecticut State Music Teachers Association in 1959 and again in 1991. In 1988, he wrote a book on teaching piano, emphasizing the playing of chords and popular music.

PROGRAMS CAN INCLUDE:

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| Special Themes: | An event, place, or person. Whatever is requested |
| Dancing or background music: | Includes audience participation, musical games and dancing (ballroom and line). Requests are welcome. This makes every program different. |
| Broadway, etc: | Broadway, movies and popular music, including an historical current date segment. |
| Entertainment trivia: | Name that Tune, TV Show, Broadway Show, Artist, Early Radio (age appropriate). |

If a piano is not available, I will provide my own electric keyboard/synthesizer and peripheral equipment.

Available for:
Special Occasion Parties and Gatherings
Entertainment Trivia Games
Sing-a-Longs